Coping with Diversity. Reflections on Homelessness in Research in Europe

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Introduction

In the Italian version of the 2008 MPHASIS report[1], the terms "homeless" and "homelessness" in the original English version are translated – in just five lines – with four different equivalents: (a) homelessness (in English); (b) *disagio abitativo grave* (serious housing hardship); (c) *persone senza fissa dimora* (persons of no fixed abode); and (d) *persone prive di abitazione* (persons with no accommodation). The terms (b) and (d) refer to the housing conditions of the persons concerned (*disagio abitativo* is the traditional term in the housing debate) while '*persone senza (fissa) dimora'* is the term usually employed by organisations working with homeless persons. This term may be equated with roofless persons, and is generally understood to denote those persons at advanced stages of marginalisation, characterised by multiple deprivation and long-term homelessness. This mutability of definitions and terms is fairly common in debates on homelessness: evidence, after decades of advancement, that the understanding of homelessness is still uncertain. It is an understandable uncertainty, given the heterogeneity of the phenomenon and the multiple dimensions of the notion.

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[1] MPHASIS (Measuring Progress on Homelessness through Advancing and Strengthening Information Systems) was a two-year project funded by the European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities under the PROGRESS Initiative. It ran from December 2007 to December 2009. The main objective of MPHASIS was to improve monitoring of homelessness and of homeless policies in 20 European countries in a coordinated manner.

Heterogeneity in Homelessness Research

Dealing with heterogeneity has been a constant challenge in the research both in Europe and in the United States. Divergence in research approaches to the notion of homelessness is evident in relation to two perspectives: the way in which housing dimensions (the lack of accommodation) are combined with the social dimensions of homelessness (the factors which make homelessness a situation of social exclusion); and the way the notion is extended beyond the reference to the "literally homeless". For example, Toro and Janisse (2004: 244) note that:

> Most researchers have settled [the definition issues] by studying the "literally homeless", that is, people staying in shelters for the homeless, on the streets, or in other similar settings (e.g., in abandoned buildings, in makeshift structures, or in parks). There are many other persons who are precariously housed or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. Researchers may include these figures, but will define them as a group separate from the literally homeless. Many researchers and advocates now talk about homelessness in the context of a continuum of housing that runs from the stably housed to the literally homeless, with many persons falling between these two extremes.

In reality, the question of how broad the concept of homelessness should be does not coincide with the range of housing conditions. In fact there is no consensus over how to define homelessness in housing terms. As FEANTSA (2008: 5) has observed:

> For some observers, the link between housing and homelessness is an obvious one. For others, this link is significantly subordinate to socio-economic issues such as employment, relationship breakdowns, mental health and addictions. [There are] areas of substantial agreement across Europe as well as […] areas of disagreement or difference in perception or approach.

The difficulties in defining homelessness may be found on both the defining axes. The adoption of a broad definition introduces logical problems that may weaken the consistency of the notion, as we will see. As for the relationship between housing and social dimensions, the divergent research approaches outlined earlier reveal the intrinsic complexity of homelessness that results in difficulties in marrying together these two dimensions of the homelessness issue. Definitions and descriptions have addressed this duality but have combined the two dimensions in different ways, usually privileging one over the other. The different approaches have also been expressed within a number of conflicting interpretative frameworks, making it even more difficult to reconcile housing and social dimensions.

To a large extent, the different interpretative frameworks reflect ideological divergences. Difficulties in defining homelessness are inherent in the socially constructed character and in the policy implications of the definitions. Moreover, they reflect the

different academic/research traditions to which researchers refer. That is the inter-disciplinary tradition of housing studies on one hand, versus the more sociologically oriented tradition of studies on poverty on the other.

The understanding of homelessness as a housing question has provided the dominant framework in research. In this chapter, I wish to focus on framing homelessness as an issue of poverty. The general debate on poverty and social exclusion has been richer, and generally perhaps more rigorous, than the debate on homelessness. This is especially the case in the formulation of concepts, which allow for the adequate treatment of the heterogeneity of the phenomena, such as the multidimensional and processual nature of poverty.

Despite the divergences, the "literally homeless" have nevertheless been at the centre of the definitions and collective representations of homelessness. They represent both an area of overlap between the various different definitions of homelessness and the extreme case of a restrictive definition. The concrete figures which represent these extreme situations – roofless, *senza dimora*, *sans domicile fixe*, etc. – have been used as illustrations in "typical" (ideal) reference material and have underpinned the interpretative and communicative assumptions on which the debate on homelessness has developed.

The focus on extreme situations occurs by combining extreme situations from the viewpoint of the lack of housing accommodation and extreme hardship from a social point of view: situations of serious social marginalisation (isolation, "disaffiliation", etc.), which identify the homeless as "social figures" in the representations. Furthermore, the representations are most often focused on the multi-problematic / chronic aspects of homelessness, suggesting an "over pathologised" image of the homelessness (Snow *et al*. 1994), supported by "individual" approaches to homelessness (fairly popular for a time even among researchers).

Changes in perspective

During the period between the late 1980s and the start of this decade, two main changes occurred which modified the definitions and notions of homelessness, and which also modified the theoretical construction of the field. The first is the new attention paid to "structural" dimensions as opposed to an "individual" approach, with increasing emphasis on the role of factors such as housing, employment etc. The other change was towards an "extensive" approach: an extension of the notion beyond the limits of strict homelessness to include larger populations than the literally homeless. This extension has been made most often in the sense of including the various situations of housing hardship or marginal housing in homelessness or connecting them with it. These trends have converged in moving away from rooflessness or long-term homelessness as the dominant reference and from

the identification of homelessness with (extreme) social marginalization. The reasons for considering borderline situations or risk situations may be justified for both theoretical reasons and because of recent changes in the composition and profiles of homeless population. On a theoretical level the extension of the notion responds to two main concerns: that of taking account of the (increasing) extension of homelessness, and that of taking factors into consideration that explain the "production" of the phenomenon (Tosi and Torri, 2005).

The idea that poverty needs to be analysed as a process – a fundamental point in the paradigm of social exclusion – provides the opportunity to connect homelessness to wider conditions of the production of poverty in its various forms. Linking homelessness to these wider conditions was made possible by notions such as risk and social vulnerability. In the new theoretical framework, the notion of social exclusion ('*désafilliation*') – even in its extreme forms – is no longer seen in relation to the individual deficits of the homeless population, but as the (extreme) outcome of the growth of social vulnerability in post-Fordist society (Castel, 1995).

Working on heterogeneity

The new trends were mainly prompted by the need to deal with the increasingly heterogeneous composition of the homeless population. Heterogeneity was already strongly perceived in the 1980s as a feature of the "new homelessness", contrasting with (the homogeneity of) traditional vagrancy. For a period, heterogeneity was dealt with in terms of "types" of population, trying to link different experiences and profiles of homelessness to different social profiles: young homeless persons, homeless women (see the work of the European Observatory on Homelessness between 2000 and 2005). This research helped to broaden the identification of homelessness so that it encompasses more than only those "extreme" situations represented by rooflessness and long-term homelessness. In some countries an important contribution came from research on homeless immigrants. In most cases homelessness among immigrants is more clearly tied to such factors as difficulty in gaining access to housing markets and insecure employment. There is a high probability of immigrants suffering housing exclusion without serious marginalisation occurring and an even higher probability of them suffering housing exclusion without those features of "personality de-structuring" suggested by the "conventional" image of the homeless. They are simply poor people without a home. This means that in many cases homelessness is temporary and that the lack of housing may be nothing more than a stage on the road to integration in a new society (Tosi, 2004). More recently, the picture of homelessness was further modified by the extension of the risk of poverty, and an increase in the material, economic component of poverty risk to new groups previously untouched by this type of risk. This means that paths to homelessness do not necessarily involve

social marginalisation, "disaffiliation" from society or such extreme experiences as absent families, institutionalisation, prison, mental health difficulties, etc. supposed to be typical of homeless persons.

Pathways Through Homelessness

Both in Europe and in the USA, systematic attention to the variation in the length and number of periods of homelessness has been the most important development in dealing with the heterogeneity of homelessness. The basic idea of thinking in terms of stages and steps – in itself a traditional idea – was applied to a closer analysis of the different pathways into and through homelessness.

An important outcome, with significant policy implications, was that households move frequently into and out of homelessness, and the majority are temporarily homeless. As articulated by Koegel (2004: 224, 230-231):

> Homelessness is not a chronic condition for the majority of those referred to as 'homeless'. Rather, it is a dynamic state that individuals enter, exit, and then often re-enter repeatedly over time […]. Substantial numbers of homeless people exit from homelessness within relatively short periods of time. [On the other hand] most of these individuals fall back into homelessness within those same time periods. Multiple cycles of exiting and re-entering [are] not unusual. [The typical pattern of homelessness] is one of residential instability, rather than constant homelessness over a long period.

This finding has challenged the understanding of homelessness – which is deeply rooted in "homeless career" interpretations – as a process which is intrinsically downwards and which has a natural regressive tendency. Also, the centrality of the roofless in the representation of homelessness is questioned. Rooflessness appears as just one of the possible outcomes. The over emphasis on rooflessness appears to be largely the outcome of research strategies with point-in-time studies which overestimate long-term and multi-problematic forms of homelessness. As it became clear that homelessness was more likely to be temporary rather than a progression towards more extreme forms of homelessness, attention started to focus "not only on routes into homelessness, but more importantly, on routes out of homelessness". And "understanding the conditions for successful long-term exiting from homelessness came to the fore of researchers and indeed policymakers' agendas" (O'Sullivan, 2008: 74-75). Generally the diversity of homelessness also emerges from this new line of research and attempts are generated to accommodate this diversity in new theoretical frames. A different way of defining differences is a sort of corollary, suggesting typologies such as:

chronic / long-term homelessness, temporary homelessness, recurrent home-
lessness; imminent homelessness, recently homeless, long-term homeless
persons; formerly homeless persons etc.

Poverty studies

All these issues were fully addressed during the same period in the research on
poverty. Here, the idea that many situations of poverty are temporary has long been
established. The methodological strategy has been the same as in the research on
homelessness: time analyses to see paths in/out of poverty, and how long poor
people remained poor and which processes determine movements in or out of this
condition. Moreover, poverty studies give a clear view of the theoretical, methodo-
logical, and also ideological assumptions on which the overestimation of "extreme"
situations is based.

Poverty too had been perceived for a long times as a long-term condition and the
idea of a natural regressive tendency characterising the processes of impoverish-
ment in general was widespread. Later, the "new dynamic approaches" to poverty
criticised both the idea that poverty is normally or frequently a stable condition and
the idea that downward drift processes are in some way inherent in the dynamics
of poverty. The theoretical reasons for the idea of a "rule" according to which
poverty lasts a long time and takes root in the course of time were: the assumption
that poverty careers are reinforced cumulatively and that they can therefore only
be pushed downwards; and the failure to recognise that the poor are people
capable of acting autonomously and of assuming the role of active protagonists.

The conclusion that many situations of poverty are temporary, that chronic
poverty is just one of the possible paths and that the cumulative character of the
exclusion process is just one of the possible dynamics of poverty has given rise
to new reformulations of poverty. It has resulted in a closer examination of the
factors that determine progressive falls into and the difficulties of climbing out of
poverty on the one hand, and on the other hand attempts to differentiate between
the types of and paths into poverty which capture the different degrees of gravity
of different types of poverty such as absolute /relative poverty, multi-problem /
sectoral poverty, and so forth.

Policy implications

The enlargement of the notion of homelessness and the importance attached to
the structural dimensions in research on homelessness – moving away from the
identification with the roofless/long-term homeless – has had considerable implica-
tions for policies. More specifically, the analysis of pathways has stimulated a
number of conclusions that are of great policy relevance: firstly, that institutional
and economic resources, such as income support and subsidised housing are the

most important factors in determining "transition" (Koegel, 2004) or permanent exit from homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2008); but also that general services and welfare resources, rather than targeted measures, provide the best means of preventing homelessness (O'Sullivan, 2008; also see Tosi and Torri, 2005). Even if the role of other factors are recognised (e.g. Dworsky and Piliavin, 2000; Thompson *et al*. 2004), it is the emphasis on the importance of institutional and economic resources, which mainly characterises this line of research.

Institutional and economic resources are specified in different ways: formal and informal income support or subsidised housing (Shinn *et al*. 1998), welfare support in the form of financial assistance (Sosin *et al*. 1990), accessibility and availability of sustained institutional support (Koegel, 2004), availability of affordable housing (Wong, 1997). What these researchers nevertheless have in common is a critique of established policies. On the basis of their research, conventional forms of intervention have been subjected to severe criticism: e.g. transitional housing and residential treatment; some forms of individual support and residence in service intensive homeless services, intervention that aims to train individuals to reduce their risk of homelessness etc. (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007; O'Sullivan, 2008).

Heterogeneity: Still at Issue

While these research studies focus on exits from homelessness or the prevention of a return to homelessness, the explanations relating to the effectiveness of institutional and economic resources extend at times to the broader issue of homelessness in general or of "residential instability" (see for instance Dworsky and Piliavin, 2000, Sosin *et al*. 1990). These elaborations bring a number of difficulties with them and they lead us back to historical problems of the debate on homelessness; and some of the arguments introduce a risk of a regression in the debate.

If the downsizing of the role of individual factors is to be set against a tradition (which has in any case been in decline for some time now) which for many years identified the reasons for homelessness in "individual deficits", then there may still be some sense to the argument. The conclusions of this line of research are even more relevant if they are assessed in a policy perspective. If the popularity of case work type individual treatment or resort to transitional housing is considered to have become general blueprints that can be applied to the entire homeless population, then the policy value of this criticism – with the accent on the role of institutional and economic resources – is clear. It is to set the clear evidence of the problems of homelessness for which conventional provision is inappropriate and which would find a solution from welfare/housing provision against an established paradigm.

Having said this, conclusions regarding the importance of institutional and economic resources in assisting transitions from homelessness present problems for two reasons. The first is that to affirm the priority of institutional and economic factors in such general terms, seems to be in conflict with what we know about the heterogeneity of homelessness, and may contradict the rationale for the analysis of the time dimensions of homelessness, which has been basically a "differentiating" strategy, an attempt at establishing more policy relevant differences between homeless populations. The second is that the opposition to "individual" factors and treatment at individual level, formulated in general terms, brings up again the entire question of the "causes" of homelessness, with the risk of taking it back to the old dispute between "structuralists" and adherents of the individual vulnerabilities argument that dominated much research in the 1980s. The question of the heterogeneity of homelessness is therefore opened up again.

The relationship between structural and individual factors has been one of the most tormented in the history of the debate on homelessness. In the end a fair consensus has been achieved on at least two points: that the opposing arguments relate to two different levels of analysis, which it is important not to reify; and that the different viewpoints need to be incorporated into an "integrated perspective". As outlined by Koegel (2004: 57):

> To explain the presence and face of homelessness […] one must consider two sets of factors: structural factors, which set the context for pervasive homelessness; and individual vulnerabilities, which earmark those people at highest risk for homelessness within tight housing and job markets.

This debate brought about new arguments and reinforced the reasons for a differentiating strategy towards understanding homelessness. If we wish to understand the diversity of the pathways into and out of homelessness, it must be admitted that to become homeless or to remain homeless, or to exit from it temporarily or permanently are all different issues, and that dealing with chronic homelessness, preventative intervention, exit reinforcement, support for "residential instability" etc. may imply considering and dealing with different sets of critical factors.

More European research is needed on this issue: we do not yet have adequate knowledge of the different pathways; specifically about the paths out of and the multiple cycles of exiting from/re-entering into homelessness. The majority of the research references cited above refer to the USA. Questions regarding pathways into and out of homelessness reveal the persistence of theoretical inconsistency in the research field: homelessness appears once again as a category which is given consistency by policy demands and inputs imposed by organisations working in the field.

If the theoretical field is to be strengthened, then the heterogeneity and multidimensionality of homelessness must be handled rigorously, starting with a serious reconsideration of the "polarisation" of the notion of homelessness and of the implications of the extension of the notion of homelessness. While as we have seen both the debate on the homeless and that on poverty offer strong arguments in favour of an extensive approach to homelessness, at the same time they illustrate the difficulties in developing this approach, and provide arguments to challenge it in favour of an extension along the housing axis.

Extensive approach

The positioning of homelessness within a housing framework involves a number of problems. The most difficult problem to resolve concerns the incorporation of conditions of inadequacy or insecurity or the risk of homelessness in a classification or interpretive framework. So we can find among the "key structural housing issues" that "can lead to homelessness" (in addition to housing affordability, the lack of availability of appropriate housing and eviction):

> the poor quality of housing – living in which can lead into homelessness or already constitute homelessness [and] overcrowded housing – which again may already constitute homelessness […] (Feantsa, 2008: 6).

This kind of extension entails questions about the notion of risk (in what circumstances does housing inadequacy give rise to homelessness?), and the reasons for including homelessness and conditions of inadequacy or insecurity within the same framework. The housing criteria is that most commonly used to broaden the definition of homelessness when the objective is to identify the homeless and construct systems for classifying the homeless. Thus, the (strictly) homeless become a type of housing accommodation, among a variety of types and located along a continuum of types of accommodation which extends from the strictly homeless to varying degrees of housing deprivation. In this case it is often assumed, even if it is not conceptually necessary, that there is a continuity between homelessness, housing exclusion, bad housing and housing needs etc.; and the notion of risk or similar notions are employed to connect the different "circles".

This type of extension turns out to be an inadequate basis for tackling heterogeneity, in particular the issue of the continuity and the borderlines between homelessness and bad and marginal housing. Certain situations included in the classifications, including many of those defined as "insecure" and "inadequate", may not be risk situations, or conversely may already be included within homelessness.

> Can all 'housing problems' be identified as 'risks of homelessness'? If risk is taken in the sense of a situation in which the probability of becoming homeless is higher, the answer is certainly no. On the one hand, only a fraction of marginal housing situations result in homelessness. On the other hand, and though further studies should be conducted on the last dwelling of homeless people, to know from what kind of housing situation they came [some research highlights that] a majority of homeless people were previously tenants or owner-occupiers of flats or houses (Marpsat, 2005: 5).

The point is that it is not possible to say whether a situation is a risk situation from the housing dimensions alone. Some situations of inadequate or insecure housing may not constitute, as such, a risk of homelessness: no more than does general poverty, regardless of the type of accommodation. If it is then considered that some "situations or characteristics could be identified as linked to a higher probability of homelessness" (Marpsat, 2005: 6), it seems clear that the determinants of risk must be sought in the interaction between various factors (identifiable at micro or structural level) that constitute the processes/risk of exclusion. For example, according to Marpsat (2005: 6):

> Some housing situations can lead to a high risk of homelessness, such as being housed by family or friends […]; living in a place where the local housing market is characterised by very few inexpensive dwellings leads to a higher risk of homelessness for all people who are either unemployed or with a precarious, part-time or low paid job. The confronting of a very tight housing market and a job market where precariousness is frequent are the main factors of homelessness […]; to have to leave rapidly the place where one lives, such as in the case of domestic violence […] to have characteristics which can be discriminated against by landlords, such as coming from a foreign country.

As for the policy implications of these questions, the critical issue is that most social measures in housing are ineffective or not very effective for the homeless. The aforementioned FEANTSA report (2008) cites housing policies and the marginalisation of the most effective measures for the homeless – public/social housing – in many countries, as some of the main reasons for homelessness. Indeed, some countries give almost no formal role to housing policy in tackling homelessness. Housing policies rather seem to tackle middle-income families, with vulnerable groups often left to other social policies to deal with. Where housing policy does look at vulnerable groups it tends to take an approach focused on specific disadvantages, for example disability, illness, unemployment or being a single parent. Homelessness itself is not seen as a cause of vulnerability.

Housing vs. (Social) integration?

A key issue about the effectiveness of policies on homelessness regards the relationship between housing and social integration outcomes. As stated by Busch-Geertsema and Fitzpatrick (2008: 74) with reference to preventative measures:

> Is the sole criterion for success based on the target group's success in avoiding the loss of their accommodation or their managing to move to other accommodation […]? Or are such policies only to be considered effective if they achieve (or preserve) a person's wider integration?

The question brings us again to the opposition of paradigms mentioned at the beginning. If the question of homelessness is set in a framework that addresses it as a "social" or poverty issue, then the emphasis is on inclusion processes as a whole, rather than on housing outcomes themselves. If the ultimate aim is social reintegration, then accommodation must be viewed as an ingredient in the social reintegration process and assessed on the basis of its effectiveness in that process. The role that rehousing plays in the inclusion processes of homeless persons can be interpreted by reference to the various reintegration experiences and the different types of reintegration achieved (Tosi and Torri, 2005).

This viewpoint is often accompanied by an underestimation of the housing factor in defining homelessness and policies for the homeless. In reality, it is a question of combining two arguments: (a) that in many situations the provision of accommodation may not be enough for integration; (b) that providing housing (apart from clearly being a sufficient response to a condition of homelessness in many cases) is in any event a powerful integration factor, even, and more paradoxically, for those in conditions of extreme homelessness.

This last argument has often been advanced in the field of homelessness as a criticism of some 'specialist' approaches (e.g. of the 'staircase approach'). Hence, it has been claimed that "the integration of homeless people should be facilitated by providing the homeless with normal and cheap housing to normal building standards, with usual tenancy agreements" (Busch-Geertsema, 2005). The same idea usually lies behind the different versions of the "housing first approach".

Numerous research studies now indicate that access to normal, acceptable, affordable housing may be a basic ingredient of the social reintegration process. However, housing in this sense is not in itself a reliable indicator of the success of a reintegration programme for many homeless persons. Reintegration cannot be guaranteed by rehousing alone; rehousing does not guarantee the creation of the 'home' dimension, that is the realisation of that set of values – freedom, security, privacy, comfort – which have been historically constructed around living at/having a home

and that lies at the heart of our integration system. Failure to 'make a home' may reveal reintegration failure. In these cases rehousing does not put an end to vagrancy (Tosi and Torri, 2005).

Conclusion: Re-framing Homelessness as Poverty

In what sense does setting the discussion of homelessness within the poverty framework and extending the concept along the poverty axis constitute a different approach, and what are the advantages? Firstly, by introducing the "social" variables commonly employed in the research on poverty, it is possible to address several critical problems in the study of homelessness, and in particular to take account of the heterogeneity of the phenomenon. This is basically because "broadening" in this direction means taking into consideration the whole set of processes that generate homelessness and that result in different histories of homelessness.

This "extension" means the inclusion of the various factors that explain poverty. Housing factors become one of the possible explanatory dimensions together with others indicated in studies on poverty. In this sense the poverty frame represents a general matrix for the study of homelessness. At the same time it provides several tools for addressing "difficult" cases of poverty – such as rooflessness – and it retains the heuristic and strategic value of the study of the 'literally homeless'. With these specifications, we can try to unravel the muddle of problems that have been built around the term "individual". To the extent that they show traces of traditional structural approaches, also the arguments on the role of institutional and economic resources at times seem to re-propose a criticism of the "individual" approaches to homelessness. And at times they also seem to downsize the importance of individual forms of support to the homeless.

In reality, "individual" can mean different things: it may indicate a level of analysis or place the accent on personal factors or individual deficits etc. If the reference is to the methods of intervention, the term may refer to the level of provision and support, or to specific types of support and forms of provision: an 'individual' method of intervention may encompass "non-material" resources and a casework approach, with perhaps a strong degree of social support etc. Clearly they are forms that can be evaluated differently and which in any case do not imply in themselves any adherence to explanations in terms of personal deficit.

The positive version of the research studies mentioned questions certain conventional solutions because they are proposed indiscriminately (for the homeless in general) and also certain "heavy" forms of individual treatment. The focus therefore returns to the variety of the forms and of the processes that cause homelessness,

in order to see if, and in which situations, and under which conditions, the forms of intervention subjected to criticism can be justified: e.g. when it is reasonable or appropriate to turn to transitional housing (Busch-Geertsema and Sahlin, 2007).

As concerns the individual forms of support, one fundamental distinction obviously regards the "gravity" of the condition in question. As has been stated, intensive programmes, such as "intensive case management" or "supportive housing" (a full range of services readily available to homeless people at the same time that housing is provided) "may be necessary for many multi-problem homeless people, simpler interventions can be effective for others" – for example the provision of housing subsidies (Toro and Janisse, 2004: 249). This is the most appropriate area for putting the case for (certain forms of) individual work and casework as opposed to the value of institutional and economic resources.

A similar indication can also be seen in theoretical tools that insist on the consequential character of events, such as, for example, the "moral career" concept (Goffman, 1961): if it is applied to cases of rising pathways and to the possibility of reversing negative spirals, then the concept offers important recommendations for policies against poverty and social exclusion. It suggests that these policies do not necessarily have to offer total support to persons suffering hardship in order to be effective. Most frequently it is sufficient (and at times best) to take action to reverse the path of a downwards-drifting "moral career", by contributing to or triggering the occurrence of a positive event (e.g. by offering a job opportunity or contact with voluntary groups and hence stimulating a personal reaction which makes subsequent positive events more probable).

This type of approach provides two practical criteria for intervention. The first concerns the indeterminate nature of the type of resource on which the effectiveness of the intervention depends: the "appropriate" resource is not determined by the factors that have constituted the problem nor directly detectable from any specific "manifest" demand at one point in time, but rather requires "individualised" assessment of the role that it can perform in the integration pathway.

The second criterion concerns the possibility that integration pathways must involve change in motivations, dispositions and capacities and that they must reflect the importance of dimensions which affect even the deepest cognitive and emotional levels. Under the individual treatment approach there is a perception – certainly in many cases badly defined and developed – which has been constant in poverty studies: that poverty is a more complex "absence" than simply lack of "objective" resources, such as income, employment, housing; but, even less obvious, that poverty is also the inability to use the resources offered – chronic poverty equates with the progressive loss of these abilities.

Over the course of the recent history of the social sciences, different concepts have been proposed that can help to address these "deeper" dimensions (even if it must be stated that the use of these concepts is often deployed with a culturalist approach which plays down the importance of material conditions and lack of opportunity). They include concepts such as the "culture of poverty" some uses of the notion of social capital which place the accent on personal and cultural (Fukuyama, 1995), and the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1980).

Recognition of these deeper dimensions of poverty is better now than in the past. That poverty is now understood as not merely a problem of access to resources but also as implying a lack of ability in taking advantage of resources has been one of the most significant developments of poverty studies in the last two decades (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum and Sen, 1993). This development has led to a perspective on poverty centred more on individual capabilities for using resources and trans- lating them into well-being; whereby poverty is understood as the absence of the capabilities to access available resources effectively. So far this approach has been on the margins of the debate on homelessness and only recently some contribu- tions utilising the capabilities theory have been proposed (McNaughton, 2010 and Fernandez Evangelista, 2010). Its theoretical potential, however, still waits to be appreciated and systematically exploited in the research on homelessness.

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